

California State University
Expository Reading and Writing Course
2013-14

Course Purpose:

The goal of the Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) is to prepare college-bound seniors for the literacy demands of higher education. Through a sequence of eight to ten rigorous instructional modules, students in this yearlong, rhetoric-based course develop advanced proficiency in expository, analytical, and argumentative reading and writing. The cornerstone of the course—the ERWC Assignment Template—presents a scaffolded process for helping students read, comprehend, and respond to nonfiction and literary texts. Modules also provide instruction in research methods and documentation conventions. Students will be expected to increase their awareness of the rhetorical strategies employed by authors and to apply those strategies in their own writing. They will read closely to examine the relationship between an author’s argument or theme and his or her audience and purpose; to analyze the impact of structural and rhetorical strategies; and to examine the social, political, and philosophical assumptions that underlie the text. By the end of the course, students will be expected to use this process independently when reading unfamiliar texts and writing in response to them.

Students successfully completing this course develop skills, knowledge, processes, and dispositions in the following areas of academic literacy: reading rhetorically, writing rhetorically, listening and speaking rhetorically, and habits of mind. In alignment with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy (CCSS for ELA/Literacy), key student learning outcomes for the ERWC include the ability to do the following:

Reading Rhetorically Outcomes

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says and implies
- Analyze how ideas, events, and/or narrative elements interact and develop over the course of a text
- Determine the meaning of words or phrases as they are used in a text
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument
- Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text
- Analyze an author’s assumptions and appeals (e.g., ethos, pathos, and logos)
- Analyze the extent to which the writer’s arguments anticipate and address reader concerns and counterclaims
- Analyze the writer’s use of rhetorical devices and strategies
- Understand key rhetorical concepts such as audience, purpose, context, and genre through analysis of texts

Writing Rhetorically Outcomes

- Write a variety of text types for real audiences and purposes, making effective rhetorical choices in light of those audiences and purposes

- Contribute to an ongoing conversation in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline and context
- Write reading-based arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence
- Develop academic/analytical essays that are focused on a central idea and effectively organized
- Incorporate the texts of others effectively and use documentation styles suitable to the task, genre, and discipline
- Edit for clarity and for standard written English grammar, usage, and mechanics
- Select words and phrases that express precise meaning concisely and effectively, taking into consideration the rhetorical purpose of the text
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- Demonstrate the ability to observe, evaluate, and regulate one's development as a writer of expository texts, including the identification of areas needing further growth

Listening and Speaking Rhetorically Outcomes

- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with peers
- Prepare for the thoughtful, evidence-based, and well reasoned exchange of ideas
- Collaborate with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions, and decision-making
- Pose and respond to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; examine a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; identify and use rhetorical strategies in discussions; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.
- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, effectively, and appropriately.

Habits of Mind Outcomes

- Act as motivated, self-directed learners
- Persist during difficult academic tasks
- Consider new ways of thinking and being; see other points of view
- Apply prior knowledge to new learning
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Adapt to new situations, expectations, demands, and disciplines
- Learn to critique their own and others' academic work
- Reflect on their learning and on the processes that shape knowledge
- Demonstrate the ability to be both open-minded and discerning
- Establish routines that support advanced literacy practices
- Challenge their own assumptions

By including specific outcomes for habits of mind, the ERWC recognizes that postsecondary success depends upon the development of a literate identity and a sense of academic agency. ERWC helps adolescents accomplish this by building task persistence and competence through engaging module topics, such as racial profiling, fast food, and juvenile justice, and appropriate instructional scaffolds. Coupled with the focus on rhetoric and critical thinking—the “real-work” of college and adults—ERWC is for many adolescents the first time they will adopt academic identities and see themselves as potentially successful college students. The course thus specifically targets the capacities of a literate individual identified by the CCSS for ELA/Literacy as defining traits of college readiness.

In addition to the preceding student learning outcomes, the course is also guided by a set of key principles of an effective expository reading and writing curriculum:

1. The integration of interactive reading and writing processes;
2. A rhetorical approach that fosters critical thinking and engagement through a relentless focus on the text;
3. Materials and themes that engage student interest;
4. Classroom activities designed to model and foster successful practices of fluent readers and writers;
5. Research-based methodologies with a consistent relationship between theory and practice;
6. Built-in flexibility to allow teachers to respond to varied students' needs and instructional contexts; and
7. Alignment with California's Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy.

Course Modules:

The twelve instructional modules in the ERWC—from which adopting schools select eight-to-ten—are organized by semester. Most modules include multiple reading selections on a topic, often representing different genres. Course texts include contemporary essays, newspaper and magazine articles, editorials, reports, interviews, memos, assorted public documents, scholarly studies, and other nonfiction texts. Three modules include full-length works—a work of nonfiction in semester one and two novels in semester two. Adopting schools must select one full-length work in each semester. Schools are strongly encouraged to select modules in sequence and to consider the balance of text types and writing assignments in the eight-to-ten modules they select. All modules integrate text-based grammar study with rhetorical reading and writing; schools are strongly encouraged to incorporate these lessons based on the needs of their students. Formative assessments appear throughout each module to promote ongoing evaluation of student progress toward achievement of learning objectives. Written summative assessments and holistic scoring guides conclude each unit. Modules include instruction in critical reading, analysis of rhetorical strategies, vocabulary, research methods, documentation conventions, and analytical writing based on information learned from and in response to the assigned texts. The ERWC Assignment Template is fully aligned to the CCSS for ELA/Literacy and provides consistent structure and content for each module. The following is a brief outline of each module by semester.

Semester One

Introduction to the ERWC

For many students, the rhetorical approach to reading and writing embodied in the ERWC may be relatively new. This brief experience introduces students to the context, aims, and core elements of the course, as well as to its fundamental concepts and definitions. A reflective activity helps students build metacognitive awareness, establish learning goals, and frame their expectations for the course. An interactive experience engages students in the rhetorical analysis of an everyday visual text thus piquing students' interest in the work of course.

What's Next? Thinking About Life After High School

As the opening module for the Expository Reading and Writing Course (college applications are usually due in October or November), this module focuses on establishing foundational attitudes toward college and adult life language practices. Students will be asked to use reading, writing, and research to identify their post high school goals, evaluate their readiness for such plans, and then effectively represent themselves to the community they wish to join.

Rhetoric of the Op-Ed Page

This assignment sequence introduces the Aristotelian concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos and applies them to a rhetorical analysis of an op-ed piece by Jeremy Rifkin on animals' capacity for experiencing human emotions. Students also have the opportunity to critically engage opposing views on the issue. Culminating writing assignments include a letter to the editor in response to the Rifkin article and an animal "Bill of Rights."

Racial Profiling

This module has been designed to provoke students to take a stand on the controversial topic of racial profiling. Students identify, analyze, and evaluate the rhetorical moves Bob Herbert makes in his professional essay before determining the extent to which they will use similar strategies in their own essays.

The Value of Life

This module asks students to synthesize their understanding of Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy; an excerpt from Chris Jones's interview of Roger Ebert; an article by Amanda Ripley on the aftermath of 9/11; and a life insurance tool, the Human Life Value Calculator. Students are asked to add their voices to the discussion by creating a well-developed response to the question engaged by these sources: How should human life be valued? The summative writing assignment is a reading-based essay of 750 to 1,500 words.

Good Food/Bad Food

The module was designed to evaluate three proposals which argue for different approaches for responding to the obesity epidemic. Students analyze the proposals and consider how they were constructed to convince their audience. They then gather additional evidence from Web sites and from a survey they design and administer. The final assignment asks them to write a proposal of their own for how to improve the eating habits of students at their school.

Into the Wild

The nonfiction, full-length work *Into the Wild*, by Jon Krakauer, was published in 1996. Engaging students in this biography/story based on Krakauer's investigation of Christopher McCandless, a young idealistic college graduate, allows them to think deeply about human motivation and perhaps begin to understand something of the complexity of maturity. Excerpted in the book, students experience a taste of the works of the American Transcendentalists and Russian novelists, which so influenced McCandless's life philosophy. Students conclude the assignment by writing a text-based academic essay on one of a number of themes from the work. Students are expected to write an essay of 1,500 to 2,500 words.

Semester Two

Bring a Text You Like to Class: Bridging Out-of-School and In-School Literacies

This module builds on texts that students bring in to share with the class and serves to introduce the second semester. Throughout this sequence, students work on externalizing and building conscious awareness of their existing textual skills and knowledge and discovering ways that they can bring their current reading expertise from outside of school to bear on texts in school that they have never encountered before. Textual analysis begins with pieces from students' own worlds representing a variety of subjects and genres. Then by finding scholarly articles on their topics students call upon their background knowledge and strategic reading skills to comprehend the text. Writing assignments require students to annotate, map, chart and summarize multiple readings. The final writing assignment asks them to develop a multi-genre portfolio consisting of four to five texts of different types that they author themselves about a topic they know well outside of school. Students then write a portfolio introduction of 400-500 words that orients readers to the variety of genres they've included. They also describe what they have learned about themselves as readers and writers and consider how to use this new knowledge to support their future reading and writing.

Juvenile Justice

The module explores a legal issue and the way in which scientific evidence and personal observations and experience contribute to different strongly-held points of view on the topic. Students practice analyzing different genres of text from a rhetorical perspective. The final on-demand assignment asks students to respond to a recent Supreme Court decision on the topic and to construct their own argument on one or the other side.

Language, Gender, and Culture

In this module, students interrogate gender norms and how those norms are enforced by social pressures. They begin by reflecting on their own experiences with gender-based social pressures, deepening their understandings of the relationships between language, gender, culture and identity. They then read a transcript of and view a short talk by Judith Butler, which should help to prepare them to think more carefully about the concepts in the module. In addition to asking students to reflect on a range of topics including gender, identity and race, the module readings ask students: to consider how norms of behavior are enforced through language and social interaction; and to analyze the ways they may have been silenced or

witnessed others being silenced. The final writing assignment provides them with an opportunity to transform their own silence into language and social action.

1984

This module explores George Orwell's dark, complex, and controversial novel, *1984*. The novel is full of big ideas and themes: totalitarian rule, surveillance technology, mind control, propaganda, the role of the individual versus the collective, the relation of language to thought, and even the nature of reality and perception. The novel is often read as a tragic story of an individual, Winston Smith, who tries to stand up to the totalitarian government and fails. This module is designed to help students go beyond the simple plotline and engage with some of the larger philosophical ideas and themes, in part by carefully reading parts of the novel that are often omitted: the chapters from the fictitious book by Emmanuel Goldstein, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, and the appendix, "The Principles of Newspeak." In effect, the novel integrates a literary narrative with fictional expository texts, which makes it ideal for use in an ERWC module. The culminating writing assignment offers a choice of four prompts, each of which explores one of the themes of the novel. Students are asked to use material from their notes and annotations of the novel to support their position on the issue of the prompt.

Brave New World

This module explores Aldous Huxley's dystopian science fiction novel *Brave New World* in light of Neil Postman's argument in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that we are actually more in danger from hedonistic but mindless pleasures than from Orwellian totalitarianism. The culminating writing assignment offers a choice of four prompts, each of which explores one of the themes of the novel. Students are asked to use material from their notes and annotations of the novel to support their position on the issue of the prompt.

Bullying: A Research Project

This module critically examines various forms and definitions of bullying, as well as divergent views of the causes and possible responses to bullying that can be made by schools, teachers, and students. Students also analyze their own school's bullying policy. For the summative assignment, students write a guide for new students at their school so that they understand what bullying is and how best to respond to it, either as a target or as an observer. The guide must be research-based, visually appealing (e.g., graphs, bullet points, etc.), and include a reference list of sources. Students may also choose to make a video to supplement their guide.

Final Reflection on Learning: The ERWC Portfolio

The final instructional sequence and capstone assessment for the ERWC is the "Final Reflection on Learning: The ERWC Portfolio." In careful alignment with the ERWC goals, the portfolio includes a reading-based argument letter that serves as an analysis and reflection on the student-selected writing samples and the course.